

The Ancient, Part 1: A History Re-Written

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Summary: Told you it was coming! What would happen if the Pemalites were alive? In this opening part, we also find out Ereks dark secret.

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by Rick W.

* * *

>AN: This is Part I of The Ancient. The first ten chapters. PLEASE give me feedback, and tell me if you want me to bother with a part II. Please! And I know a lot of people read my stories, but hardly ANY review them. SO IF YOU'RE READING THIS YOU'D BETTER REVIEW IT AS SOON AS YOU FINISH! Eep, sorry. I tend to get out of hand. But please DO review it, and be honest._

For Kori. Wherever you are.

* * *

><p><p>

Chapter 0 (PROLOGUE)

EREK:

"Do you ever miss them?" I asked Maria. Her older human hologram had "died" and she now was a beautiful girl about the age I looked. She was a "new student" in the Animorphs' school, which I guess you could call mine, too. She looked at me, startled.
>"Miss who?"
"You know," I pressed, "the Pemalites." A tear

streamed slowly down her holographic cheek. But only because she was letting it. I guess many people wonder if we have emotions. The Chee, I mean. The answer? Yes. We are machines, perhaps, but besides that fact (and that we are four times stronger than the average human) everything about us was the same as an organic being. We feel happy, sad, we experience love, hate, pain, fear, joy. That is the incredible (and perhaps elsewhere unachievable) strength in the Pemalite technology. Or some may see it as a weakness.

>"Of course," Maria's voice was barely above a whisper. "I'd do anything to get them back. Some-- sometimes I dream of Lalika romping around the old forests, playing with me. And I with her. And everything--," she broke off and let out a sob, "everything was right. As it used to be. We were there. They were there. It was home. It---" she broke off and started crying now, tears flowing like a river down her face. Yes, the were holographically projected tears, but tears just the same. And although technically Maria doesn't have a heart (in the organic sense), I could feel her pain as it broke into pieces yet again.<p>

"You say you'd do anything to get her back," I began. "Do you mean it? Anything, I mean?"

>She looked up at me sadly. "Anything. *Anything*. I just want them back." The pained expression on her face was almost too much to bear, yet I realized that my hologram probably looked the same way automatically. At times I don't even have control over facial expressions. Almost as if I am human.

>"We are peaceful creatures," I said. "You must realize that this was the Pemalite's only flaw. We could not fight, even if to protect ourselves. Or. . . or them."
She sighed in defeat. "I don't even remember my morals anymore. They programmed them into us. They're not here. But. . . but Erek, I don't know if I want to fight. To hurt."

>"It's the only way. I know where the Time Matrix is."
She gasped. "You mean, it's real?!"

>"Of course," I replied. "As real as you and me. Wait. That may not be the best comparison. . . "
"Anyway,"

>"Come with me," I said. And I led her to a place I never thought I'd go. . . .<p>

~~*~*~*~*

MARIA:

I gasped at the sight of the shining, spherical weapon. I remember telling Marco, one of the "Animorphs", that the Chee would not become a race of killers. So much for that. We had stopped by the beach on our way here, and Erek had dug around for a while and uncovered the Pemalite Crystal. (Sensing extraordinary amounts of energy comes in handy at times, I guess.) I grasped it in my hands, which, for the time being, were soft and young, well moisturized, and wrinkle or calouse-free.

"How--" I stammered, "how do we use it?"

>"Place your hand on it," Erek instructed. "Think of where you want to go. And when."<p>

I imagined the home world. I thought about it, craved it. I thought back to right before the Howlers, those filthy pieces of. . . trash. . . came. Thought back. . . thought back. . .

WHHHHHIIIIIIIRRRRRRRRRRR!!!!!!

Suddenly, I was there! Lalika threw the ball at me and I jumped to catch it. Miss. I ran after it, and saw Erek.

>"Hi," I said in the native tongue. "You have the crystal?" I became serious, remembering our mission.
"Yeah," he said. Suddenly, I felt a tingling.

>"Our programming has been succesfully altered." He barely finished his sentence when a huge fissure appeared between the ground we were standing on with a deafening CRRRRRRRAAAACK!!!! He fumbled and dropped the crystal. It didn't matter. It couldn't be destroyed. I turned around for the threat I knew was coming. Suddenly, about seven or eight Howlers appeared out of thin air. And I prepared to -- for the first time in my life-- fight.<p>

Chapter 1

My name is Rachel.

And I was standing on a balance beam, trying to keep my concentration. I was the second-to-last one up in the tournament. And I kept stumbling.

> I try to remember the grace of a cat whenever I'm on the balance beam. But right now, I was on the verge of tumbling off fifteen feet. Sure, there were mats below, but that didn't guarantee me no broken bones.<p>

All the while, I just kept thinking: _Cat, cat, cat, cat. . . _ But my thoughts were all jumbled.

> I remembered getting cut in half as a starfish. I remembered getting nearly killed many times, getting swallowed by the Veleek. So many deaths. So much pain. And the whole time I kept thinking:
Morph, morph Rachel! Morph out!

> At the same time I was remembering the cats' grace and balance.<p>

And I started morphing.

> My ears sli up the side of my head, and my nose shrunk. Then whiskers just popped out from my cheeks. People noticed.
"Aaaaaaaaahhhh!"

> "YEEE-AHHHHH!!!!" I shrunk, and I heard a schwooop! as my spine elongated into a Fluffer McKitty tail. Fur sprouted all over me. Black and gray striped fur. And I still hadn't noticed. Then my legs grew shorter, and shrank from under me. NOW I noticed.
STOP! Reverse the morph! All the while people were yammering and screaming. And I saw Chapman staring up at me. He mouthed one, small, single word. _Andalite_. He couldn't tell what I was morphing yet.

>
I fell. My legs had shrunken, I started wobbling, and seeing Chapman made me lose the last shred of my concentration. I fell.

But not as a human.

Or a cat. But as a weird mix of the two. When I was fully cat, I was still falling. Only the floor was a thousand feet below me! Not fifteen!

> < Aaaaaaahh! > People heard me. I didn't care. Out of the corner of my eyes, I saw a look of confusion cross Chapman's face.

Then a smile of recognition.
 "Human." Then I started morphing. Not back to human, but to eagle! This was insane! It wasn't possible! Unless. . .
> Was I allergic? The Hereth Illint? I hadn't acquired an animal in a while. And now. . .

BANG!

"Ouch!" I yelled.
> < Rachel, are you okay? > A thought-speak voice asked.
 "Huh?" I was on the floor. But not of the gym. I was tangled in sheets.
> The sheets of my bed. A bird fluttered into view.
 "Tobias?" I asked, only half-awake.
> < No, some other talking red-tail. You were having a nightmare. >
 "You know Tobias, it's my job to be sarcastic."
> "What are you doing here?" I asked him. <p>

< Emergency meeting at the Hork-Bajir valley. The others are already there. > I shook it off. I started morphing. Owl. And, to my surprise and fascination, so did he. By the time my beak formed, my mouth had still been hanging open.
> < Tobias, how did you get an OWL morph? You hate owls! >
 < Yeah, well. . . >
> I was impatient. < 'Yeah, well' what? >
 < I had to. There's a mission coming. I'm no use in the dark, > he said.
> < Mission? All right! A chance to kick some Yeerk butt! ><p>

< We're here, > he said, ten minutes later. We landed and demorphed.

> Slowly. I decided this was my chance to try something. I had been taking, well, morphing lessons, from Ax. I hoped I could morph half as good as Cassie. I focused on keeping my wings. Then I was fully human, or at least I thought, when the others came running up. Cassie took one glance at me and smiled. I finally let my wings go, and put my human arms own to my side as soon as they formed.
> < Excellent, Rachel! > Ax said privately. < You are becoming a natural estreen. >
> I tried thought-speaking to Ax, but then I realized I was human. And only Cassie and Ax knew about my 'lessons'. If I said 'Thanks' out loud, they would know I was talking to Ax or Tobias, since in human form it is impossible to make thought-speech.
 < You're very welcome. > I shot him a look. He smiled his Andalite smile.

"OK, so why are we here?" I said. I'm the kind of get-to-the-point person.

> "Well, we were going to throw a pool party, and what kind of a party would it be without Xena: Warrior Princess?" Marco, of course.
 "Marco?" I asked.
> "Yes?"
 "Shut up."
> "Yes ma'am!" he saluted and I clenched my teeth.<p>

"Well," Jake interrupted, "the Chee have some news for us."
> "Uh-oh." Marco said.
 "Oh be quiet, you big baby!" I replied.

> "Remember the Pemalites?"
 "Uh-oh," Marco said again.
> "Well, they're not dead." I looked at Marco.
 "Find the 'uh-oh' there, Weenie-boy,"
> "Well," Marco said, "If the Pemalites are alive, we have to find

them. Which will probably involve some incredibly strenuous and death-defying suicide mission where we try to take up Visser Three, bungee jump into an active volcano, and get ourselves killed."<p>

"Hello." I turned around to see EreK. "Well, as you know, it turns out there is a group of Pemalites who have somehow survived." I had a bad feeling.

I drew my arm back and punched him in the nose. He fell over, and his nose started bleeding.
> "Yeerk!" I hissed.<p>

Chapter 2

> "Rachel!" Three human voices and two thought-speak voices all said at the same time.
 "Rachel, what the--" Jake began.

> "Yeerk!" I repeated. "Look at him! He's bleeding! Androids don't bleed! If I had punched the real EreK I would have broken my hand!"
 "She's right," Cassie said, putting her hand over the impostor's nose. He's definitely bleeding." Now I have known Cassie forever, and I love her like a sister, but there are times I think she's nuts. Just down-right cuckoo.

> She whipped her sweatshirt off, up and over her head, ripped the sleeve off, and wrapped it around "EreK"'s nose. Kneeling there in her jeans and a bra.
 Jake just stared with his mouth open.

Marco's hand reached his across Jake's eyes. And with that, Cassie put back her sweatshirt, minus one arm, and acted as if everything was perfectly normal. Marco took his hand away from Jake's eyes. Cassie continued tending to the Controller.

> "Cassie, that was insane." Marco said. I nodded.
 < Hey, Rachel, > Tobias called down. < You just agreed with Marco. >

> "Aaaaaaaahhh!" I let out a mocking scream. Then. . .
 Cassie revived EreK's impostor. Ax picked up a twig and poked it into his back.

> < Don't try anything, > he sneered. < You do, you and your host will be fried like a human's bacon. > I bit my lip to keep from laughing. The Controller froze. He thought he had a Dracon Beam pointed in the small of his back.
 < Walk. > When he didn't, Ax pressed the twig into his back harder. < I said walk, Yeerk scum. > The Controller was visibly shaking, but started moving, nonetheless, and we made it to one of the Hork-Bajir's caves, which, since they live in trees, were uninhabited. We sat EreK's look-alike down in a chair, and tied him up.

> "Ax," I said, "you have been watching too many western movies."

 "Aaaah!" the Controller yelled for no apparent reason.

Then everything, everywhere, stopped.

"This again." I muttered.

> IT IS GOOD TO SEE YOU, TOO, RACHEL.
 "What do you want?" I asked the Ellimist.

> YOUR SUSPICIONS ARE CONFIRMED, he said, ignoring my question.
 THE FIRST EREK IS INDEED A CONTROLLER.

> "Yeah, well, not three days from now."
 YES THREE DAYS FROM KNOW. HE HAS A MAJOR PART TO PLAY IN THE GRAND SCHEME OF THINGS. HE WILL JOIN THE PEACE MOVEMENT.

"Well, that's good to know!" I said sarcastically. The others were

still frozen. "Anything else?"

> NO. JUST TO LET YOU KNOW: DO NOT DESTROY THIS YEERK.
 I sighed.
"Oh, fine."

Time started up again.

"Aaaah!" the Controller yelled.

> "Yeerk!" Marco said.
 "Yuh-y-y-y-e-yes," the boy stammered.

> "Ax?" Jake asked. Slowly, Ax started demorphing.
 "Aaaah!"

> "NO!" I yelled.
 Everyone stared at me. I looked directly at Jake.

>"Don't." Out of the corner of my eye I saw Cassie smile.
 "Are you INSANE?!" Marco yelled. "He knows, Rachel; he knows!!"

> I looked over at the Controller.
 I gave him a don't-do-anything-stupid-because-I'm-trying-to-save-your-life look. He nodded.

>
"Marco's right, Rachel," Jake said. "He can't walk out of here."

> DO NOT TELL ANYONE. JUST SAVE HIM. I felt the Ellimist disappear after that.<p>

"There is a way. . ." Cassie said. She was troubled. "We could starve the Yeerk."

> "No," I repeated.
 "Xena," Marco began, "do you feel okay?"

I ignored him. I turned to the Yeerk. I vaguely saw something move behind me. I had about three seconds to think, _What?_ before the flat of Ax's tail blade came down on the side of my head.

Chapter 3

I woke up. I was sitting in a chair, my hands were behind me back. I tried to move them. No! They were tied! I groaned.

> "Rachel?" Cassie asked gently.
 "No," I grumbled. "It's Gabrielle, Xena's sidekick."

> "We won't starve the Yeerk," I said. "He won't be a problem."
 "What's your name?" Jake asked him.

> "Jared." Then, "Iniss one-one-six."
 "Well you better not be a problem." Jake grinded his teeth.

> "I-uh-uh-I, uh, I won't! I promise!"
 < Look at him! > Tobias flew in. Hawks have excellent hearing. < He's scared to death, he wouldn't try anything. > I sent Tobias a thank you smile. Privately, he said to me, < No prob, Rachel. >

"So what are we here about?" Jake asked.

> "Hey, did you guys start a party without me?" I swirled around to see EreK.
 The real EreK. "I'm insulted," he said in mock sadness.

> "Why do you guys look so serious?" Then he saw past me.

"Aaaah!" It was the real EreK's turn to yell. He was so startled he dropped his hologram. His dog-like muzzle was gaping open, and his hologram flickered back on. His 'human' mouth was gaping open, now.

> "An android? Jared asked. Is it possible?"
 "A year ago I would have said that evil mind-controlling slugs from outer-space were impossible," Marco spoke up.

I swung at EreK, and his hand went up faster than Ax's tail, and grabbed my fist with the force of an elephant. "Just checking." I

smiled.

> Jared groaned. Cassie slumped down into her seat.
 "Oookay," Erek said.

"We are gathered here today. . ." Marco started.

> "You guys are here because--"
 "The Pemalites are alive." I finished for him.

> He looked startled. "Yes."
 "But what does that have to do with us?" Jake asked.

> Erek's face changed momentarily, then returned to normal. "Well, the Pemalites are alive, but the Yeerks know where they are. So do we, but the Yeerks are moving fast. Too fast. They have their transportation hooked up to a main computer in the Yeerk Pool. Unless it's destroyed. . ." he didn't need to finish.
 "Goodie, a suicide mission!" Marco interjected.

> < Hey, Marco, come stand under my perch, > Tobias said.
 "We have to go back. . . down there?" Cassie asked. _There_ being the Yeerk Pool.

I started feeling queasy. "Guys. . ." I began. I couldn't finish. I collapsed to the ground and everything went black.

Chapter 4

< Can't Erek just bring us some good news for once? > Marco asked for the tenth time.

> < Amen, > Jake agreed. For the tenth time.
 We landed and demorphed. We didn't have to worry about being that careful. The Yeerks were pretty stupid. They had put a pool entrance in the middle of the woods. Where Ax and Tobias live.

And get this: no guards. One catch. Security. High tech. Very, very, high tech. The Yeerks still kept adding on from the Andalite technology obtained from Visser Three. The Abomination. The thought of him made me tremble. And at the same time, I fantasized about him. Fantasized how I would morph to grizzly, pick up his stolen Andalite body and shred it to pieces. Fantasized about hearing the beast's screams as he had not a fraction of the torture he inflicted on others done unto him.

> It was sick, I know, but I couldn't help it. He murdered Elfangor. He. . . he trapped Tobias. He had aged us so much in so little time. It hadn't been a year, and Jake, Marco, Cassie and I already looked about two or three years older, and behind our eyes were forty-year-olds. We knew too much. More than anyone should know. But we weren't the only ones.
 I thought of Karen, the little girl. She was maybe half our age. It was insane!

> No kid should have to go through the hell of being a Controller! No human, for that matter! I thought back. I had voted to destroy her. So had Marco. But now I felt horrible. What right did I have to make the choice to take that little girl's life away? Yes, she had been a host, an apartment complex for a Yeerk, but Karen was in there, too. I'm glad. . . I'm glad that Cassie did what she did. She balances me out. When I get too violent, she keeps me on scale. Makes sure I still feel. Feel for at least some of those I kill. It's hard. But I guess you have to feel a little.
 Otherwise, I -- we'd be like, well, the Yeerks. Not all of them, but most.

We looked around. No one. At least as far as we could see. Jake looked up.

> < All clear, > Tobias confirmed. I smiled. He was our eyes.

Without him our secret might be out. I would be lost. I didn't want to think about life without Tobias. He was right above me, flying, breathing, alive. He landed and started to morph to human. Then I felt. . . something.
 "Rachel?" Cassie asked cautiously.
> "Eliminist!" I hissed.
 < Surprise, > Ax "said." < Surprise, surprise. > just as a horizontal line split across his face. We waited for him and Tobias to finish morphing.
>
"Why do I get a really bad feeling about this?" Marco whined.

> "Hey, Marco!" I exclaimed. "I just realized what your theme song is!"
 "Yeah, what would that be, Xena?"
> " 'I'm a Weenie You Can Throttle!' " I started to extend my hands around his throat.
 Jake smiled. Then he laughed.
> "Oh, that was so not funny," Marco said. He pointed at Jake.
"Traitor!" he shouted. "Evil traitor!" <p>

We came to an excessively tall Oak tree. Like something you'd see on the Hork-Bajir home world! Jake touched a panel that was almost invisible. A door slid open, and we were in a small room with a computer panel taking up the whole freaking wall!

"Keyboards!" Ax exclaimed. "Actual primitive keyboards! Board. Ore duh.

> Kuh eeeeey buh oard. We had these centuries ago! Of course, now our computers are powered by a mind-link and artificial. . ." He was cut off.<p>

"Ax?" Jake asked hopefully.

> "I am a warrior, Prince Jake. Not an archaeologist." Ax said regretfully.
 "Are. Our. Keee. Keeehhl. Jist. Keyohljis. Keykeykeykeykey. . . sorry,"

> "Great," Jake muttered. "Just guh-reat!"
 "Oh, let me try," Cassie said, sounding annoyed. We all stared. Cassie is not a computer person. No one objected. She shoved into the seat, typed for a minute or two, pushed away, and said, "Done." My mouth dropped open.

> "Bu- huh, how. . .?" Jake was speechless. I had to laugh.
 "Woman Power," Cassie said. She grinned slyly, and slapped me a high five.

> "You go, girlfriend!" I said. <p>

The door slid open.

We could go in now. The Yeerk Pool.

Oh, goodie.

What was I, insane?

Chapter 5

I started morphing. Fly. Trust me, it's gross. Jake spotted me.

> "No," he said, "this is a spy mission. We need something with good eyes and ears, but that could go unnoticed. . ." What morphs did we have that filled those requirements? None. I saw everybody slump with defeat.
 "Prince Jake," Ax said. "There is a way." Jake's ears pricked up like a puppy.

> "And that would be?"
 "Human. You could go as yourselves. Tobias and I could use our human morphs. It is extremely risk taking, but I see no other way."

> "Ax?" I asked. His eyes turned to me.
 "Can Andalites give birth to twins?" I saw Cassie's eyes light up with recognition.
> "Of course," he said, "occasionally, even triplets." He still didn't get it.
 Nobody except Cassie did.
> "Identical?" I questioned him.
 "Yes. Andalite internal structure is very similar to that of humans. For example, once per month--"
> "Don't you mean one of our months?" Marco interrupted. Ax ignored him.
 "The egg travels down a certain tube to be expelled along with blood and unnecessary tissue and excrement through the--"
> "Ax?" Jake stopped him. "We get the point.
 Suddenly Ax understood the reasons for my questions. He started demorphing. I stepped forward, and placed my hand upon his forehead once he finished.
> "With your permission," I whispered. Then I started morphing. My chin started itching, and I went up to scratch it, and I realized my whole hand was sprouting with blue fur! I started to yelp, when my mouth sealed together.
 "Hmmp!" Morphing is never logical. Ever. It's not like you gradually become a different animal. Different body parts appear or disappear whenever they feel like it. But I started focusing on the lessons Ax had given me. The morphing slowed. Soon I was a human covered in short blue fur except for my face. It was still normal, until I felt my eyes widen, and noticed my field of vision expanding. Unlike my elephant morph, my nose slowly shlrurped BACK into my face until all I had were two nostrils. They began to grow, as a long, curved nostril formed in-between.
> POP!
 POP!

Whoa! Vision! But vision like no other human would ever experience. If you've never seen an Andalite, and let's face it, you haven't, it is impossible to sneak up on them. Not only do they have their main set of eyes, but they have a pair of stalk eyes that can rotate in every direction. They can look all around them. But right now, I had the extra eyes sprouting from my hair. No stalks.

> Through one of the eyes I saw Marco stick his tongue out. I tried using thought-speak.
 < Marco, I wouldn't do that if I were you. I have eyes in the back of my head. > Then they just slowly lifted off of my head as the stalks formed.

> I now had a completely Andalite head, a blue-furred human body, and my legs started mutating. My legs got thinner, until I was sure they wouldn't hold me up anymore. More legs! I thought. More! Another pair sprouted from my chest as I fell down and landed on sleek, Andalite hooves, and the muscles in my leg strengthened. Not for standing bipedal, but for running and jumping. My butt started sloping down.
 I was an Andalite without a tail. An Andalite without a tail is just sad.

> The morph stopped.
 "Come on, Rachel, finish up." Jake said, eyes wide from my expertise at morphing.

> < I -- I can't! > I stuttered. I focused. Tail. I thought. Gimme my tail. Nothing.
 < Nooooo! > I wailed. < Noooooo! > I collapsed onto my four knees. I got back up and WHUMF! My tail shot out, arced up and over my shoulders, and stopped right against Jake's neck.

< Don't anyone move. > I said. Only it wasn't me.

Suddenly, I regained control of my mind, although there was no one else to control it. I had no Yeerk, I would know if I did. I drew my tail back and yelled.

> < Aaaaaaah! Who did that?!! > Jake was pale.
 "What could

that have possibly been?" Cassie asked.

> "She's a Controller," Jake said.
 "No," Marco replied, even now, he was sticking up for me.

> < Hey, Marco? > I said privately. < Remind me never to threaten to kill you anymore, K? >
 "How else do you explain it?!" Jake raged.

> < Prince Jake, I must disagree. Rachel is not a Controller. She has too much control over herself, and the Ellimist told us she is free.>
 "Screw the Ellimist!" Jake yelled. Tobias' human morph fumed.

> "Oh, me oh my! We can't have this, can we?" The Drode popped out again.
 "Again," he said, "I want nothing. But Jakey, that's no way to treat your cousin. After all, she hasn't been taken. Crayak would never give her to a pathetic SLUG." Poof! He was gone.

> "Even Crayak's defending her!" Tobias finally spoke up.
 "Who's to say that's a good thing?" A new voice appeared. I turned around to see Erek.

> "Erek, whose side are you on?!" Tobias raged.
 "Yours," he said. "But we have a hypothesis on what may be going on."

> "Hypothesize quickly," Jake said.
 A mind struggled within my own. FWAPP! My tail flew. A foot away from Cassie's throat, it flew back. PPAWF!

> < What's HAPPENING to me? > I demanded.
 < Ax! > I said. < Keep your tail blade at my throat. If that happens again. . . > I didn't finish. He knew what to do.

> Ax's tail blade whipped around my throat.
 "Yeerks," Erek said.

> < I'm not a Controller! > I said.
 "No, that's not what I meant. The Yeerks have had the sneaking suspicions that the 'Andalite bandits' are human for some time now. They no longer care whether you are alive or dead."

> "Cheery," said Marco.
 "They know -- or think they know -- that one of you morphs Andalite to cover up. Therefore they are using mind-wave control that manipulates and Andalite mind that isn't a true Andalite mind. If you morph an Andalite, severe problems may arise."

> "NOW you tell us?!" Jake asked, somewhat hysterically.
 < What about Ax? > I asked.

> "He is a real Andalite, therefore he is not affected."
 < Tobias, Marco, Jake, Cassie, > I commanded. < Get small! Ax and me go Andalite. And we give the Visser a little surprise! > They had no clue what I was talking about, but they started morphing anyway. We didn't question Erek any further. We just took off. Down into the Yeerk Pool. This had gone from spy to suicide!

>
 < Yaaah! > I yelled. < Let's do it! >

Chapter 6

< Dude, I hate when she says that! > Marco whined.

> < What, "let's do it"? > I asked innocently.
 < Aaaargh! >

> < Hey, Marco? You just better let me know before you have a buffet back there. > The others were in flea morph. Marco and Tobias on me. Cassie and Jake on Ax.
 < Ax, > I said. < Get as far away from me as possible. We'll see if this mind-control thing has a few _bugs_ in it. No offense, guys. > Ax and I casually walked down the stairs like it was nothing. We were so casual I thought no one noticed us.

> "Aaaaaaah!" Yeah, right.

TS- FWAPP! BOOM! A Controller had just pulled the trigger at Ax when hi sliced down the front of the Dracon Beam. It imploded. In the Controller's hands. Well, hand, singular, now.
> "Aaaaaaah!" Three Hork-Bajir walked up to me. I rolled my eyes. Three to one. Like they could win. They were fast. I was faster.
< Oh, > I said as I brought the flat of my blade down on one's head, knocking him unconscious. < Yeah, > FWAPP! I sliced an arm off the second.

< Right! > FWAPP! The remaining Hork-Bajir lived long enough to wonder why his head was rolling across the floor. I had lost patience. In the old days, all three of them would have been dead. I'm just too nice sometimes. I shook myself out of the triumph to realize I had about fifty Human Controllers standing around me. The big deal? They had Dracon Beams. If I so much as twitched. . . wait! That was it!

> < Argh! > I yelled. I started twitching compulsively. I fell to the floor on my side, jerking and screaming. A dozen or so of the Controllers ran up.
 < Gotcha! > FWAPP! A hand went flying.

> "Aaaaaaah!" FWAPP FWAPP FWAPP! I struck ten times in a row, only hitting them on the head with the flat of my blade. One! Two! Five! Ten!
 < Ha ha! Steeee-rike! > One more Controller crawled by. FWAPP!

> < Make that a spare! Take that you filthy slugs! >
 FWAPP! I felt a tail blade around my neck. < Very good Andalite. Good fighting. For a child. > Did I forget to mention that Ax was only about our age in comparison? And I was Ax?

> The Visser! He HAD me!
 < I would take that as a compliment coming from anybody except you, you disgusting filth! > I spat. Well, not literally, since, you see, I had no mouth.

> < Turn on the mind-- > he began. I jerked my head back away from his tail, banging into his chest and knocking the wind out of him. I spun around.
 < Hey, Visser! Here's one right in the kisser! > I brought by tail around sideways and smacked him on the side of his head with it. His head barely stayed on his shoulders. Then, FWAPP! My blade was at the Visser's throat.

> < No! > He cried out.
 < One move, any of you, and your Visser's head rolls like a human's bowling ball, > I sneered.

> < Ax! > I said privately. < Can you find the mind control thing? >
 < Yes, Rachel, I am right here next to it. >

> < Good! > I shouted. < Destroy it! ><p>

TZAAAAAPPP! The lights flared down, then back up again. But in that short time the Visser had taken his tail and knocked mine aside. Now it was me whose head would fall.

> < Say goodbye, Andalite scum, > he gloated.
 I had lost. < Goodbye, Yeerk filth, > I sneered. His tail twitched. Then --

> TSEWW! A Dracon Beam fired! Right at Visser Three.
 I looked around for an explanation. There it was: Cassie! She started morphing. Horse. I whipped my tail around the closest person's neck.

> < You! > I said. < The Pemalites! Where are they? > She pointed over to a computer console. I let her live, after knocking her out. I galloped to the computer console, and said < AX! > A majestic creature leaped over the whole length of the Yeerk Pool with Controllers firing at him. He was going through air the whole time. TSEWW! Perfect shot! Nope, he ain't there anymore. He landed a few feet away.
 < You bellowed, Princess Rachel? > he smiled that Andalite smile. Great. A sense of humor. < The computer. > I began. < It has information on the Pemalites. How-- > FWAPP! Ax sliced through

the console. He stuck his weak arm through, and I heard a riiiiiiip as he dragged out a small black core.

> I could have done that. >

> < Rachel, it is a rational suggestion that we LEAVE! NOW! >
he said.
 < Way ahead of ya, Ax! >

> < What's wrong? > Marco asked. < I'm trying to eat dinner and the table starts bouncing. >
 < MARCO! >

> < Kidding, > he said. < Just kidding. Geeze. >
 < What _is_ happening, Rachel? > Jake said.

> < I don't know. > It was the best answer I could give.
 < This entire facility is going to explode in one of your minutes. >

> < One of our minutes?! > Tobias shrieked.
 < Don't _you_ start with the your-minute-our-minute thing, Tobias! > Marco complained.

> "Termination in sixty seconds." The computer spoke up. "Thank you, and have a nice day!"
 < I don't know what surprises me more, > Cassie said. < The fact that this WHOLE place is gonna blow, or that the computer has good manners! >

> < That's really not the problem at hand! > I yelled as we reached the stairs.
 "Termination in fifty seconds. Thank you, and have a nice day!"

> I had to morph! But that would mean passing through my human form.
<p>

Unacceptable.

But I had to get small! Small and agile. _Cat!_ my brain shrieked. _I can't, you moron, I'm already IN morph!_

> My brain ignored me. Cat! My cheeks started itching, as whiskers sprouted from them.
 < Aaaaaahhh! > I yelled.

> < Rachel! > Tobias screamed.
 < I'm fine, Tobias. Just totally, totally, FREAKED! > I replied. Ax's stalk eyes swiveled toward me as we galloped up the endless stairs. They widened. I turned black and gray.

> < Oh, boy, > I said. My hooves turned into paws with soft pads! I sped up the morph. Pop! My little kitty nose popped onto my otherwise "normal" Andalite face. My features became slicker. I was a gigantic cat! Too big!
 SHRINK! SHRINK, dang it! If I was going to morph weirdly, it better at least happen to my advantage! I shrunk. I felt my Andalite tail begin to change. No! I stopped the morph. I was a cat with an Andalite tail. Swift, agile, and deadly.

> "Meee-ooooowr!" < I am sure the Hork-Bajir are extremely frightened, Rachel, > Ax said helpfully.
 < When did _you_ get a sense of humor?! > I yelled.

> < What happened? > Jake demanded.
 < I - um. . . morphed, > I said.

> < What did you morph? > Cassie asked.
 < Um. . . a cuddly little kitty? >

> < You went through your human form?! > Jake was enraged. < Jake, > I said. < That's the problem. I didn't. >
 < Oh, dear. > Marco said.

> < We're clear! > I yelled. Immediately, I started demorphing.
 < Rachel, the others may wish to see what you morphed. >

> < Oh. Right. > I turned back into the messed up little kitty with the big blue tail. As soon as Cassie's mouth grew from her disgusting flea jaws, she yelled, "Aaaaah!!!"
 < Oh, and how do you think you look? > I asked her.

> "Eep!" Marco said, halfway between human and flea. Guh. Ross.

Everyone finished demorphing. Except me.

Erek stood a few feet away.

> "A frolis maneuver?" He asked, obviously surprised.

> < No, > I answered him. Then, < Ax, can I demorph?

>
 < That would be wise if you wish to stay human. You have two Earth minutes. >

SCHHWOOP! My tail sucked into my spine. My ears shrunk. I morphed at top speed to human. My back legs strengthened and my front legs shrunk. My paws turned into hands and feet. My whiskers just disintegrated. My nose became more three-dimensional. All my fur disappeared except for that on my back, which turned blond and connected to my transforming skull, lifting off of my skin, becoming hair.

> As soon as I was human I collapsed to my knees on the ground.

Tired. So tired. <p>

BOOOOOOOOOOOM!

The ground reverberated from the explosion of the Yeerk pool.

> "Ouchie," Marco said.
 "Yeah," Cassie agreed. "Major, _major_ ouchie."

A jolt of electricity zapped through me and I bolted up.

> "Ax! Do you have the computer core?"
 < Yes. > I sighed in relief. < However, I cannot activate it. >

> Too soon.
 < Erek? > Tobias called down.

> It was settled. <p>

Erek led us over to his house.

Chapter 7

"Absolutely," Erek said. "Remember, we know everything the Pemalites know. Or knew. . .At the time when Andalites were learning to build fire."

> < I am close to taking offense, Erek, > Ax said.
 Erek took the core and dropped his hologram. He interfaced with it, and made his hologram a computer.

> "Thought this might be easier to watch for you guys," he said.
 Then, a screen came on.

It was a map of the state we were in. I'm not telling you which one, but I'll give you a hint. It's one out of fifty.

> There was a flashing red dot over in the corner.
 "Man!" Marco exclaimed. "That's like, four hours away!" I tried to think of a clever insult, but I couldn't come up with one. Erek did it for me.

> "Not 'like' four hours," Erek said, "it is four hours. About. Well, four point two-nine-five-six-three-eight hours, to be exact, but it's close enough."
 < And where are we? > Ax asked. A big red arrow appeared on the screen pointing to our state. It said, "You Are Here. . . somewhere"

> "Here we go with funny aliens again," Marco whined. My brain cleared.
 "Marco, keep it up and you'll be on the side of a milk carton."

> "Sunny and Dale?" he asked. "Or Dairy Queen? You know, because I hate Dairy Queen. . ."

> "What about Lactaid?" Jake interjected. A red dot appeared.

"Seriously," Erek, the 'computer' said, "you are here."
 "Erek," Cassie asked. "Can you print that out somehow?"
 > "No," his hologram returned to normal. "But I can draw you a map."
 "We'll take whatever we can get," Jake said. Erek went to human hologram, grabbed a sheet of paper and a pencil, and his hand raced across the paper. In less than ten seconds, we had a beautiful, hand drawn (though you could hardly tell) map of. . . well, our state. Two large red dots. One was where we were. One was where we're headed.
 > "Well," I said, "let's--"
 "Uh, uh, uh." Marco interrupted me. "Don't say it."
 > I saw Cassie hide a smile.<p>

"Do it." Jake finished for me.
 > Marco rolled his eyes, shook his fist at the ceiling and yelled "Why? Why?! Oh, why?"
 < Jake, it's ten o'clock. We better get going. >
 > Jake glanced at his watch. "You're right, Tobias. Thanks."
 < No problemo. >
 > "Wait!" Cassie cried. "We should bring the blue box! How are we going to get them back here?"
 "Cassie, these are the Pemalites. These guys could probably make a blue box for _nothlits_ they're so advanced," Jake said. He was looking at Tobias while he said this. I smiled.
 > < I doubt it. > Tobias said. < Where would I go, if I were human again, anyway? >
 "Well. . ." Cassie said.
 > "Tobias, this is where you say, 'uh-oh'," Marco said. "When Cassie gets an idea." I shifted my weight to my other foot, and 'accidentally' stepped on Marco's toes. Hard.
 "Ow!" he yelled.
 > "Oh I'm sorry, Marco," I feigned. "Did I hurt you?"
 "No, you just broke all twenty-four bones in my foot!" I hid a smile.
 > "Let's go!" Cassie cried, frustrated.
 "Bye, Erek," Jake said.
 > "Bye guys. Good luck."
 "We'll need it," Marco said encouragingly.

An hour later, Ax piped up, < We have been in morph for fifty percent of the time limit, Prince Jake. >
 > < Have I mentioned don't call me 'Prince?' > Jake asked.
 < Yes, Prince Jake, you have. >
 > < Ah. Just checking.>
 < Rachel, bank a sharp right, when I say. NOW! > I turned, and a huge, funky looking bird swooped past me.
 > < YAAAAAAH! >
 < Going somewhere, my little Andalites? > Visser Three asked.
 > Jake started the order not to say anything, but I didn't listen.
 < Visser Three! > I said with a mix of disgust and hatred.
 > < No. Thanks to you, I have been demoted. It's Visser Five, now. >
 < You're still a slug, as far as I'm concerned, > I said.
 > < Ooh, a feisty one. Tell me, Andalite. Where is the blue box? >
 < Wouldn't you like to know? > Jake sneered.
 > < How many of you are there? > he asked, obviously frustrated.
 < Guess! > A familiar thought speak voice came as an osprey zoomed right up to Visser Five's belly.
 > < Aaaaaaaaarghh! > the Visser cried. He tumbled from sight.
 < You go, Cassie! > I asked. Then, privately, I added, < Thanks, Tobias. >

> < Hey, Rachel, > Marco said. < I got a blond joke for you.
>
 < No, > I insisted. < You don't. > He ignored me.

Some things never change.

< What do you call a blond with a half wit? >

> < Tobias, > I asked, < how many birds does it take to maul
an osprey? >
 < You have no sense of humor, Rachel. And I mean
none. > Marco answered.

> < Marco, you know why you're so dumb? > I didn't wait for him
to answer. < You use all your brain just to make jokes. No, wait,
if you actually an effort they might be funny. . . > Cassie
laughed.
 < Prince Jake? Do you like flying? > Ax asked.

> < Don't call me Prince, and how could anyone not? It's great!
>
 < Then Marco and Rachel can resume their endless banter,
since you will not mind being stuck in these bodies. >

> < Great time to develop a sense of humor, Ax. How much time do
we have? >
 < Ninety-seven percent of the time has passed. >

And trust me, you have never seen birds dive to the ground faster
than we did. We had to deMORPH! Tobias stayed up watch. He didn't
have to worry about a time limit for being a bird. He was a bird.
At least, physically. In his mind was the body of a boy trapped to
kill to eat his own breakfast every day, who lives in fear of
raccoons and owls because at any time they might decide he'd be a
tasty treat. Why he didn't just morph human and stay human, I had no
clue. But after two hours, he would be a human forever. Without the
power to morph.

> I guess he wanted to continue the fight. That was an excuse. But
maybe he just felt better being away from an uncle who would beat him
at every TV commercial and an aunt who didn't know he existed. I
mean, as a bird, you can fly. You can FLY!<p>

There may be something better than flying on your own wings in a
thermal on a hot day, but I can't begin to imagine what it is.

And I'll definitely bet that you can't, either.

Chapter 8

We were back in the air, good for another two hours. Which, according
to Erek, was about how long it would take. At least, that's what I
thought he said. But, you see, that couldn't have been right,
because down below in the forests I spotted a dog. A very, very, out
of place dog. Not a Pemalite. But how would a dog get out
two-hundred miles into the forest?

> < Ax! > I said. < How long have we been in morph? >

< Fifteen of your Earth minutes. >

> < Isn't that redundant? > Marco wondered. < I mean, if
they're our minutes, then they're Earth minutes. If they're
Earth minutes, they're our minutes. I mean, come on! >

> < Marco? > Ax asked.
 < Yes? >

> < If you do not discontinue your irrelevant and endless chatter,
I will be forced to assist Rachel and dispose of you. >
 We all
laughed.

> < That was funny, Ax! > Cassie said.
 < Thank you. I have
been practicing. >

> < Rachel, why did you wish to know our time? Surely you could
tell it had been less than two hours. >
 < Should we land? >
Tobias wondered.

> < No. Keep following the trail. Let's get there as quick as we

can, > Jake responded.
 < Sir, yes _sir_! > Marco said mockingly.

> < Tobias? > I asked. < I repeat: how many birds does it take to maul an osprey? >
 < Very funny, Xena, > Marco said.

> < Can we get back to our job? > Jake asked.
< Which is to. . .? > Marco began.

>< Oh, oh, oh, go totally crazy-- > Cassie sang.
 < Aaah! Cassie, don't scare me like that! You listen to Shania Twain? > I shuddered. < That's one more reason for me to lock my doors at night. >

> < Look! > Cassie cried, totally ignoring me. < That! >
 < What? > Tobias asked. < All I see are trees. >

> < I believe that the one being down there is not one a tree, > Ax stated. I focused my eyes, and it was definitely NOT a tree. It was. . . it was a dog! Except it was standing on its two hind legs.
 < Pemalite! > Jake shouted.

> < Wow, Jake, you're quick, > Marco said sarcastically. < Next time I need a tutor, I'll call you. >
 < Was that an example of human sarcasm? > Ax queried. Marco started to say something, but I cut him off.

> < Yeah, Ax, that would be sarcasm. >
 We stooped into a dive.

> < Hey, Mister Pemalite! > Marco called.
 < Excuse me? > I asked.

> < Or Misses, > he grumbled.
 < Much better. > I smiled inwardly. The Pemalite stared up at us totally confused by a bunch of talking birds appearing out of nowhere. We landed and demorphed. The Pemalite looked at us questioningly. Carefully forming words with its muzzle, it said, "Ruwt?" It tried again, and basically got the same result. Finally, the Pemalite just gave up, barked into a digital device on his wrist, and pressed a button.

> *What?* the machine translated. Then the Pemalite saw Ax. "Rooooowr!" he howled. Shaking his head in disgust, he banged the digital device on his wrist and jammed a button. I knew then it was a he, because it was using the 'break-it-to-fix-it' method. The "Macho" way to fix things. You know. He looked at Ax. *What are you?*
 < I am an Andalite. > Ax said, as if that explained it all. The Pemalite nodded, satisfied.

> Everyone was too startled to say anything, so I spoke up.
 "We are humans," I said in my slow, talking-to-aliens voice.

> "Does anyone else find this slightly weird?" Cassie asked.
 "We're five kids and a freak alien from the most messed up planets in the galaxy--" Marco began.

> < I resent that, > Ax interrupted.
 "Resent it all you like. We're five kids and a freak alien from the most messed up planets in the galaxy fighting a race of evil brain-stealing slugs from outer space in the hopes that we can delay them until a bunch of blue, four-eyed, scorpion-tailed centaurs come to kick their slimy butts, and we just met a telepathic dog who can walk. Weird? Nah, no way."

> "Marco?" I asked sweetly.
 "Yes, Xena?"

> "Shut up."
 < Is Xena not a television show? It is on the same channel as the Young and the Restless. Aiaiaiaiaiaia! >

> "Ax?" Jake spoke.
 < Yes, Prince Jake? >

> "You're scaring me."
 < I am sorry, Prince Jake, >

> "Just Jake," he said tolerantly. The Pemalite looked at me.
 Your name is Xena?

> I shook my head, already used to the idea of a talking dog. "No," I said, "that's just what the people of the Lollipop Guild call

me."
 "Ignore them," Marco said to the Pemalite, gesturing towards me and Ax. "They are nuts." He drew his finger around his head in the universal 'cuckoo' gesture. Since I was standing right next to him, I reached out and grabbed his arm. Slowly, deliberately, I bent it back.

> "Yowww!" he cried. "See?! She's a phsyscopath! Certified toon!" I bent his arm farther.
 "Yeeeeeeeahhhh! Okay, okay, I'm sorry, I beg, let go, stop that HURTS!" I let go and he dropped to his knees cradling his arm.

> "The wonders of Kito," I smiled devilishly.
 *Are humans always
this. . . * the Pemalite began.

> < Informal? Yes, I believe so. > Ax smiled an Andalite smile
done only with their eyes. Then for some reason, everybody shut up.
For a minute, I didn't know why. But then I felt it. Something. . .
out of place. It didn't belong. But where was it? <p>

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_VRROOOOOM!!_ I looked up. A Bug Fighter!
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TSIIIIIW! TSIIIIIW! Its twin Dragon beams fired. But it wasn't a Dragon. I could tell right away. There was no flash. More like a --

FWAAP! FWAAP! Faster than the eye could see, Ax's tail struck twice. Seemingly at the air, but then I saw two objects falling to the ground. Cassie ran over and studied them.

> "That's weird. . . Hey, Ax, come here for a second." Ax trotted up beside her.
 < Yes, Cassie? >

> "Have you ever seen anything like that, before?" her voice was shaken. I walked over. Two things that appeared to be over-sized bullets, maybe the size of a sparrow! But there was a small slit in each of them, and a green fog was smoking out.<p>

— I was standing there with the others, talking with the Mercora. A flash of light shout out towards the comet that had been circling them for the past few days. But my eyes saw farther. All the way into space. A large bullet -- ridiculous! It was the size of a small bird! It collided with the comet. Nothing. Then, the fog seeped out. .

I remembered all this in the blink of an eye, even though I hadn't been able to see through space. But who knows? It was sixty-five million years before any of us was even born.

Chapter 9

"RUN!!" I screamed louder than I ever thought possible. Even Ax had no clue what was going on, but I guess everyone saw the horror on my face. We ran, and the mob of dogs started following us. Can this day get any weirder? I wondered. We ran for maybe a minute, when--

```
##      B00000000000000000000000000000000M!!!!
```

The earth itself seemed to shake. The explosion was huge. And we weren't far enough to be safe. The momentum of the explosion swooped Cassie up and out of the corner of my eye, I saw her start to morph osprey. But she couldn't concentrate (you try focusing while flying fifty m-p-h!) and the morph reversed itself.

WHAM! She flew right into a tree and was out cold. Maybe alive. Maybe not. This all happened in less than five seconds. And I didn't see

any more. Because the next moment I was flying through the air, and a piece of wooden shrapnel flew straight at me from behind, hit my head really hard, and I was gone.

I would be gone for a long, long time.

End
file.